

FTS-OD OAM

Moderator: Morgan Jackson
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Morgan Jackson: Good Afternoon and welcome to this second conference call for PAR-06-372, *CAM at Minority or Health Disparities Research Centers (R21)*. This PAR is a re-issue of PAR-05-152. In the first conference call, held May 11, 2006, we discussed the review process and how to read your summary statement. The transcript for that call is posted on NCCAM's website. The theme of today's technical assistance conference call is: **Revising your applications – Strategies and Tips.**

In addition to Dr. Kozel, joining me this afternoon are two current Program Officers who came to NCCAM from successful research careers in academia, Dr. Kate Stoney and Dr. Partap Khalsa. As with previous calls, this Conference Call is being recorded. A transcript will be posted to the "Supplemental Information for Applicants" Web page for PAR-06-372 on NCCAM's Web site.

This afternoon's agenda will include this introduction, after which Dr. Stoney and Dr. Khalsa each will have approximately 15 minutes to discuss NIH research project grant applications from the perspective of successful former applicants. I will then provide summary comments, highlighting and reviewing selected points, and we'll have time for questions before closing.

With that being said, I'd like to turn it over to Dr. Stoney. I'd like to ask you to give the listeners some information about your background so that they

have a context within which to appreciate the valuable information that you'll be sharing with them.

Kate Stoney: Okay. Hi. My name is Kate Stoney, and I'm a program officer at NCCAM. The programmatic areas that I cover for NCCAM are mind-body medicine, mental health, and reproductive health.

My background is in psychophysiology and I am trained as a health psychologist. My funding from NIH came from a couple of different institutes, primarily NHLBI, the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, but other institutes within and outside of NIH as well. I have about 20 years of experience of writing and getting grants and then conducting the studies.

I thought I'd talk a bit about some very general aspects or some tips in grant writing and then just cover a couple of points that are unique to writing a revised application. It maybe useful just to go back and think about some of these broad writing tips first.

The first thing that comes to mind both in terms of when folks review grants as well as when funding institutions are considering funding is that you really want to think carefully about the hypotheses that you're proposing, and you want to make sure that your project is really hypothesis confirming. A lot of times, there's a tendency to want to write applications that have lots and lots of hypotheses or ideas that may emerge from the study, but the strongest applications are those that are hypothesis driven. In relation to that, you really want the overall rationale for your study to be strong and coherent and this is going to derive from a strong hypothesis driven application.

A second point that I think really helps in formulating a very strong application is your research team. As PIs, you obviously have clear expertise

in your primary areas of focus but most of you are conducting truly interdisciplinary research and really need to amass a strong team that can work together. Your application can be enhanced tremendously when you have that kind of very strong team with relevant expertise. You want to make sure that your application has representation of all the major areas that are going to be addressed both in terms of your design and the outcome variables in your application, and here, I'd like to make a pitch for making sure that you include expertise in biostatistics. This is an area that is frequently overlooked.

Related to that, power calculations and sample size calculations are important. These are things that review committees actually do look at carefully and if you have a strong and accurate sample size calculation, you actually have a stronger design and rationale for that design. So I would say that that's something that you want to spend some time thinking about carefully and making sure that you've got it right.

Your overall methodology is also important. You want to make sure that you're detailed in the areas that are particularly relevant to your questions. There are many details in your methodologies that you all know about but you may not articulate because you think it maybe obvious. But it's important to remember that reviewers of the grant application are expert in certain areas but not in all areas. So you want to make sure that you really articulate all of the details that you think are critical, even those you think are obvious in your application.

Finally, in terms of these broad issues, I would say to be careful in constructing your application. It sounds trivial but it really does matter if you're application is sloppy. You want to make sure that it's clear, that you don't have errors -- either typographical or grammatical; you want to make sure that it's easy to read, and that it's accurate. Reviewers often will have to

review maybe a dozen or even many more than a dozen applications and they get tired. So you want to make sure that your application is as easy to read and as understandable as possible.

In addition, there are the instructions associated with program announcements that need to be followed. They can sometimes be dense, but it's really important to read those instructions and follow them carefully. If there are aspects of the instructions that you don't understand, it is important to follow up and get the answers to those questions. You can follow-up with your program officers, with other NIH officials, or even colleagues and mentors who can be great sources of information.

So those are some broad issues that would apply to any grant application that you may want to put together. Now, I wanted to highlight a few additional issues to think about in a revised application, things that you want to consider both before and while you are putting together your revision.

The first piece of advice, which again is obvious, is to think really carefully about whether you want to revise the application. In order to do this, you'll want to consider the comments contained in the summary statement and you want to think about them carefully. There's a tendency for us all to read those summary statements and decide that no matter what, you're still right and the reviewers are wrong. You really want to move forward from that view and really take a good look at what your reviewers are recommending. Turn to your colleagues, turn to your mentors, turn to your research team members, and ask them for advice. Share your summary statements widely and talk with your program officer for advice. Oftentimes, certainly at NCCAM, program officers make a very strong attempt to attend review meetings and they can help you interpret and read between the lines of the summary statement.

So that's the first issue that you really want to do: Ask yourself the question -
- Does it make sense to revise? The second thing to do if the answer to that question is yes, it does make sense, is to really lay out in a very honest way the major issues that are addressed in the review. Think carefully about all the ways that you might want to address the issue and then when you do so, be clear and be concise in how you respond. Don't think that you have to do every single thing that every reviewer requests that you do or suggests that you do. What you do have to do is think about everything that's in that review. But you want to consider the comments of the reviewers within your own areas of expertise carefully and then give a carefully reasoned, empirically-based response to the criticisms or critiques in the summary statement. It's really up to you to decide what to do about the criticisms or critiques but you do want to make sure that you consider every single criticism or critique.

Then, I would really strongly recommend that you leave yourself enough time to take that revised application to your colleagues and your mentors, and certainly your team members, and get input about your revised application. In your revised application, you want to highlight all of the changes that you make in some way, and you can do that in any number of ways. Circulate the revised application to your colleagues and to your mentors and get input about whether you really have addressed the critical criticisms adequately. Share not only your revision but the previous summary statements as well. This can be very valuable because what your colleagues and mentors say will likely be a reflection of what the subsequent reviewers will say as well.

Again, make sure that your revision is easy for reviewers to read, make sure that you indicate that you've listened and that you've responded and of course, you want to be respectful of reviewer comments even if you disagree with

them - and there are very often times when you may want to disagree. But be respectful and open to their perspectives and opinions.

One last thing, and this would apply to a general application as well as the revised application, think about whether it makes sense to lay out a conceptual model for what you want to test. It may be something that you include in your application or it may not, but very often, it will help you to lay out the hypothesis that you want to test in a more conceptual way.

So those are my general tips for grant writing and I think at this point, we want to go to Dr. Khalsa.

Morgan Jackson: Are there any questions that people would like to address to Dr. Stoney directly?

Participant 1: Do reviewers look at the appendices?

Kate Stoney: Reviews may look at appendices. They're certainly available for reviewers.

Morgan Jackson: If I could comment. Appendices are distributed only to the primary reviewers, which means the three people of the possibly 20 on the review committee will have advanced access to appendices. Certainly, the appendices are available at the review but it really is critical that the application itself be a stand-alone document. You should not count on reviewers being able to refer to information in the appendices. Most of the time, most of the reviewers will not have sufficient access to them.

Participant 2: Dr. Stoney, if it doesn't make sense to revise the application, what's next?

Kate Stoney: Well, then you start thinking about alternate applications, and you know, there may be times when the message that you get is that this perhaps isn't the right time, that perhaps the study that you want to conduct has a good kernel of an idea, but it may not be ready for primetime yet, and maybe there are some additional preliminary data that are necessary before you carryout whatever the study was that you initially proposed. I would encourage you to think of what's next in terms of other alternatives rather than just throwing up your hands. Here again, a program officer can help you and you should consider talking to your program officer if you're unsure of what action to take.

Participant 3: Dr. Stoney, do you respond to each reviewer separately or you would think together.

Kate Stoney: Very often, points that come up in the reviews are shared by more than one of the reviewers. You only have a limited amount of space to respond to reviewer comments. So if you can condense them to broad conceptual types of issues, then you can more efficiently respond to them. On the other had, there may sometimes be unique comments that come up from one reviewer that don't come up for the others and you can simply respond to that individually.

Morgan Jackson: With that, I'd like to turn it over to Dr. Khalsa and ask if you would give us some background of your previous experience to provide a context for the sage advice that you will be sharing with the participants.

Partap Khalsa: Hi. My name is Partap Khalsa. I come from an academic background. I'm actually new to NIH -- I've only been here about six months. Previously, I was a tenured faculty at the State University of New York, Stony Brook in the Department of Biomedical Engineering. My background is in neurophysiology and particularly, sensory neurophysiology, and biomechanics

and particularly, spine biomechanics. Like Dr. Stoney, I have been in the trenches with you guys submitting applications to NIH and getting rejected at least as often as I got grants funded.

One of the first things I wanted to say, particularly if you're a new investigator, is you really need to have a thick skin in this business. Usually, you pour your heart out into an application and then it comes back and sometimes, it didn't even get scored and you can become depressed. I used to actually go into depressions for days, my wife used to tell me, before I could get out and regain my equilibrium to think about revising an application.

So I think that's one of the first things you had want to remember in this is that the criticisms are not directed at you personally but rather are directed at the ideas. One of the things that took me a while to learn, and that I can verify, is that the reviewers are never "wrong". They just haven't yet seen your perspective. So when I would get an application back that was not getting funded regardless of whether it got scored, what I eventually learned was that the reason the reviewers weren't ready to give this a score such that it could be funded was because I hadn't done my job in writing the application in a way that generated enthusiasm in the reviewers.

That was what I always came back to: that it was my job to write a good story, a best seller if you will, that had the right hook in it to engage the reviewers early on and then as they went through the technical application they would continue to be enthused, so that by the time they finished reading the whole application, they were just going, "Wow! This is so great!"

One of the principal things that I wanted to discuss with you briefly is this idea of enthusiasm because you certainly read this when you get the summary statements back. Often, it will make an explicit statement that either there

was high enthusiasm for this application or that the enthusiasm was diminished or there was no enthusiasm. This is a very qualitative statement for a very quantitative thing that we're doing in science.

Where does the enthusiasm for an application get generated? In my opinion and experience, the enthusiasm for a specific application is really generated as the reviewers read the background and significance sections and those sections, which usually run something on the order of two to three pages in length, set the enthusiasm and in some ways actually even set the score. Your score never gets better from that point; it can only go down the hill from there. So if they are really enthused when they finish the background and significance sections, and if there are problems in the methods or in the study design, the score gets worse from the score they have in the back of their heads after they had read the background and significance sections.

In contrast, the application might be technically perfectly designed and you might have fabulous methods. But if you have not generated much enthusiasm upfront for this application, again, it's never going to get a score that is going to put you on the range where you really can get your application funded. So this idea of establishing enthusiasm in my opinion is a critical aspect to writing a grant.

Again, I make the analogy to fiction. If you read any best selling novel, the author is really trying to hook you as a reader in the first paragraph if not the first sentence. That is, they really want to do something that grabs your attention and makes you impressed enough or interested enough in what they're going to say that you will continue reading the novel. You need to have that idea when you're writing your grant application, because if this application is boring, you're somewhat "up the creek".

The other thing about the background and significance section is that it's not really a literature review. If you only do a literature review, and some people do think of background and significance sections as lit reviews, I think you're doing yourself a disservice. In my opinion, these sections are really the place where you establish the rationale for why this study is necessary to do right now and the rationale for doing the study in the particular way that you're planning to do it. Later in the methods section and in design, you'll justify the specifics of what you're doing and say why you are going to do it this way and not another way.

Again, it's this idea of establishing enthusiasm: There's got to be a really important rationale for this study right now versus doing any other study because that's in fact what you're up against. So at any given time when you submit an application you're competing against other people with good ideas. So, it's your idea that's being compared and ranked against whatever other good ideas are coming in as well.

I think I'll stop there.

Morgan Jackson: Thank you. I think that's actually invaluable advice. I haven't heard it described in that way before. But I think it's very useful to share. Are there questions that people have for Dr. Khalsa?

Participant 4: Dr. Khalsa, good afternoon. How does one address being nontraditional? By that I mean, what if one didn't get a PhD at the age of 26, but quite late, and is just now starting out? That has come up a couple of times in my applications -- that I'm fairly new and I don't have the necessary expertise at this point in time as a PI.

Partap Khalsa: Could you repeat that?

Participant 4: My question was how does one address being nontraditional? I didn't obtain a PhD at the age of 27 or 28 or do a post-doc. I got mine at the age of 50 and I'm just now starting out. That comes up every time I turn in a proposal – “modest publications” and you're “just now starting out,” and they don't think that I really can do it.

Partap Khalsa: That's a good question, and in some ways it's relevant to any investigator, regardless of how long it has been since they got their PhD, and now they are submitting one of their first or one of the early grant applications. The question is, does this investigator have the skills or the training or the background that makes them qualified to perform the study. One way to consider addressing that is to recruit a very senior investigator who would either be a co-investigator on the application or a consultant -- regardless of whether they are getting paid on the grant.

I literally had the same thing come up. When I first submitted an application to NIH I got that exact same criticism and that was how I did it. I went out and found one of the senior people at our institution who was in the field and said, “Here's my problem: They like the idea, but they're not so hot on me. Would you be willing to join this project in some capacity?”

I was fortunate that this person said, “Yes. It's a great idea. I'd be happy to write a letter, include that letter saying that I not only think this is a great idea but willing to mentor you and give you whatever technical support might be necessary.” When I revised the application and included that information, that criticism then went away.

Participant 4: Okay. Thank you very much.

Morgan Jackson: The other thing I can suggest is that it might be worth considering one of the career development mechanisms. Basically there are two different kinds of mechanisms: The research grant (R) mechanisms, and then there are (K) mechanisms which are the career development grants. Those are intended to provide a training experience as opposed to the research mechanisms which are intended to accomplish research.

Kate Stoney: I'll just add one more thing to that and that is that I think publications do matter to review committees. Even in the absence of funding, the extent to which you can generate publications, with you playing a prominent role in those publications, will help you in subsequent applications.

Participant 4: Thank you.

Participant 5: I have a question which pertains to some comments that I received because I'm concerned about the presence of reviewers who were not knowledgeable and familiar with the various populations that we deal with, particularly, since CAM (complementary and alternative medicine) is highly influenced by culture. And so, that's the concern that I have because I received the comment that reflected a lack of understanding of some cultural aspects of the African-American community.

Morgan Jackson: So, I'll be happy to discuss your summary statement's particular comments offline if you would give me a phone call. My phone number is 301-402-1278. In general, what I would like to say is to reiterate a point that Dr. Khalsa made and Dr. Stoney made and one that I was going to make which is that the application is actually a document of persuasion as well as a document of information. One of the challenges that we have, especially with an initiative as broad as this, is that only a limited number of people can participate in the review. The scientific review administrator (SRA) has the

responsibility to get people who have all the relevant expertise. That being said it's not always possible for the individual reviewers to have the degree of familiarity with a specific application that might be optimal.

It's useful to think of the reviewers as people who are marvelously intelligent and might have a broad understanding of an area but might not have as detailed an understanding as the applicant. So as Dr. Khalsa has mentioned, it actually is incumbent upon the person writing the application to do two things. One is provide enough general information to educate the intelligent reviewers in general who might not have detailed information about that specific area but at the same time, it's critical that the application have sufficient detail to let somebody who might be knowledgeable about that area know that the principal investigator knows what they're talking about.

Partap Khalsa: I would also add to this that sometimes when you get a criticism like this, what's in your mind -- let me rephrase that -- from your expertise, is that it's just wrong. That actually in some ways is what I would consider as a softball criticism because it's relatively easy for you to address it. And once you have addressed it, it makes your revised application that much stronger because when the reviewers are now reading your response and how you may have changed the application itself, they'll realize that, A) the prior reviewer was wrong, and B) that you have diplomatically responded in a way that really argues in favor of your point.

The specific thing that you want to do in this kind of criticism is to respond to it using data rather than opinion. That is, if you can either cite work that you've done previously or someone else's work which had data in it that supported your opinion that the prior reviewer and then the critic was unaware of. As long as it's data generated, you're now responding on the basis of fact and not opinion. That's what's ultimately going to change reviewers' minds

in regards to this particular point. This is why I say it's a softball, because it's relatively easy for you to address, because they really were wrong and you know that they were. Now, you've just got to explain it in a diplomatic fashion. By citing the data in the Introduction to the Revised Application, you're actually using that introduction section for including more information and you will end up with more space for the text of the application itself. So you're actually getting something in addition to what you would have if you didn't have that criticism.

Participant 5: Thank you.

Participant 6: I have a question. I might get the review back and actually the reviewers don't have a much criticism of the proposal. They have a lot of suggestions for extending the experiment and I'm thinking the (R21) is too limited in time and budget. How do I actually respond to this?

Morgan Jackson: I would prefer to discuss that individually because in the absence of having the summary statement in front of me and having the information fresh in my mind, I can't really provide an intelligent comment on it.

One of the challenges is that the (R21) mechanism, as you accurately described, is a limited mechanism intended to support exploratory/developmental research. There are circumstances where I have counseled potential applicants that it is reasonable to cite either time limitations or cost limitations as justifications for the described scientific limitation proposed in the application. But if you would please call me, I can discuss that with you individually.

Participant 6: All right. Thanks.

Participant 7: I have a similar comment because I had given lot of vivid experimental results and they were discussing those things -- why you didn't do this, why you didn't do that -- but I just gave those data to show the reviewers that we have experience and we have supporting data to put these proposals. So, how do we address that? I mean we cannot give all the data because some of them are preliminary studies.

Morgan Jackson: Let me be clear and I probably should have said this at the beginning of the session. These sessions are intended to address general concerns regarding revising applications. I really don't want and I really actually cannot get into discussing specific applications for two reasons.

One is that your applications actually are proprietary documents. They are your personal and private information that we don't share with anyone and two, I don't have the summary statement in front of me or the information fresh in my mind that would allow me to discuss that intelligently. I've given my phone number. I need to ask you to please call me to discuss individual summary statements so that I can review the summary statement in advance of our conversation and then we can have a conversation where I can appear to be intelligent about it.

Participant 8: How do we highlight the changes in an application? Is underlining good? Is bolding good?

Morgan Jackson: Let me refer you to Page "Version 2 I-26" of the SF424 (R&R) Application Guide which says: "Identify the changes in each section of the Research Plan clearly by bracketing, indenting, or changing typography, unless the changes are so extensive as to include most of the text. This exception should be explained in the Introduction. **Do not underline or shade changes.**" Those are the things that you need to keep in mind in making changes in the research

plan of the application. You may recall that NIH is in the process of moving to the electronic submission using the SF424. We are planning another technical assistance conference call to address those issues but the date hasn't been set yet.

I had a few points that I had wanted to make that repeat points which Dr. Khalsa and Dr. Stoney made, but I think that it is useful to do so and also some of them actually might verge a little on grantsmanship as opposed to just addressing the revised applications themselves.

One point I wanted to make is that one difference between an initial submission and a resubmission is that the revised application may include an introduction of between one and three pages. Unfortunately, there is some uncertainty about the actual page limit at this time because NCCAM's preclinical guidelines are being rewritten. I have to ask you to refer to the NCCAM Website at the time you are preparing your introduction for the most current information regarding page length limitations on the introduction.

It's important to know that reviewers of the revised application will receive a copy of your summary statement and will be asked to consider how well the revised application addressed the concerns of the previous review as well as the degree to which the application was improved. As Dr. Stoney mentioned, it is important for you to address all of the comments that were made by the previous reviewers. That does not mean that you have to accept the criticisms, but you do need to address them and by address them, I mean you need either to change the application based on that criticism or, recognizing that the application is a document of persuasion as well as a document of information, use the opportunity of the revised application to strengthen the rationale for your decisions and strategies. It is important to be explicit about the changes and identify them in the ways we discussed earlier.

If you have additional data, you may include it and also it could be useful to update your publication list.

It's important to make sure that the reviewers understand that your project addresses an important topic and also that you discuss the difference that it can make. As Dr. Khalsa was saying, it really is critical that you generate enthusiasm on part of the readers.

As Dr. Stoney said, it's not unusual for a reviewer to have about a dozen applications to review. Reviewers are people who have fulltime jobs and families, and lots of other things that they're doing. They're borrowing time to review applications. So, imagine that after putting the children to bed, after finishing the day's chores, at 10 o'clock at night, the reviewer might sit down to begin reviewing your application. If the application isn't clearly written and understandable, it's going to be difficult for the application to make a favorable impression on that reviewer. So it really is important for the application to be persuasive. It's important for the application to let the reviewer know that you have the necessary skills and understanding to conduct the research and also to lead the research team.

One of the things that frequently isn't included in applications is the investigator discussing awareness of the potential obstacles that might occur in the course of conducting the research. It's important for those obstacles to be acknowledged and also to take some time describing how the investigator would address unexpected outcomes -- that is, include a good contingency plan.

It's important for the application to show that you can accomplish the experimental plan in the time requested and for the budget requested.

Dr. Stoney mentioned that the research team is very important. It's important not only that the application show that you have the experience to lead the team but also that the team has all of the expertise necessary to accomplish the project. That expertise is usually measured in terms of published papers in peer-reviewed journals. So you want to make sure that all of the people who are participating on the research team have that kind of experience.

In addition, it's important to have statistical input and to the degree possible, it's critical to have a statistician involved from the very beginning of the project, not only in the planning but also in writing the application, revising the application, and certainly in writing the sections relating to methods, power calculations and analysis.

If you have consultants, you want to have letters from the consultants agreeing to do the things that you are proposing they do in the application.

Make certain that there is sufficient information to convince expert reviewers that you know what you're doing as well as enough background information to inform a general reviewer.

One of the things that's also useful to realize though is that the second application might go to committee that has new participants. So it's important for you to take a look at your application and revise it with an eye to improving it in general - not just addressing the criticisms of the previous review committee. It does sometimes happen that new comments are raised on a revised application. Merely changing the application in response to the summary statement is not a guarantee of funding.

Dr. Stoney had mentioned that it is important to share the revised draft with colleagues. There are different kinds of colleagues who might usefully review your application. If you have access to medical editors, try to get general comments from them. It's useful to have non-specialists look at certain sections such as the budget, the budget justification, the abstract and the specific aims as well as the background and significance. Also have specialists, people who are very knowledgeable about the area in which you work, look at the preliminary data, the experimental methods and the analytic sections.

It's critical to make the application easy to read. When you're going to sleep at night, imagine how you would feel if you were faced with the prospect of reviewing a stack of about 12 applications and when you're writing the application for somebody else to review, think about that. It's important that the layout and the formatting be helpful to the reviewers, since not all reviewers will read all of your application. Some might just skim it, so it is important for information to be easy to find.

It's important to realize that the application is your representative to the review committee. On a couple of occasions, I have seen applications that had so many typographical errors or so many inconsistencies -- they might say in one place that there would be a hundred participants, then in another place say there would be 90 participants -- that the review committee actually had concerns about the investigator being able to conduct the research. The document that you are submitting represents you and you want to make sure that it represents you well by eliminating as many of the typographical errors and grammatical errors as you can and making it as easy to read as you can.

The receipt date for the next round is November 14. However, we're moving to an electronic format which is an interesting experience for all parties

concerned. Unlike previous times when you could submit a paper application at any point in time, with electronic receipt, I'm told that the computer system will be opened approximately one month before the final receipt date for applications. That means that for the November 14 receipt date, the electronic applications can only be submitted about as early as October 14.

That being said, I also need to mention that, as you know from dealing with computers, you have to dot every "i" and cross every "t". Sometimes, it has taken people up to two weeks to get an application accepted by the system. Please do not wait until November 13 or 14 to try to submit your application. In fact, if it's possible, I would encourage you to have a completed application ready for submission by October 14 in order to give yourself plenty of time for whatever issues might arise in the electronic system. That way you can be sure that you can get it accepted by the November 14 deadline.

I also ask you to plan to have the revisions done in time to allow your outside reviewers two weeks to review the application, and then have time for you to make revisions prior to submitting it.

It also will be critical for you to be sure that both you, as well as your institution, are registered with the grant.gov Website and also the NIH Website, which is called eCommons.

Those are the points that I wanted to make and we have about 10 minutes left. I'd like to open it up to questions at this point in time unless Drs. Khalsa, Stoney or Kozel have other things they want to add.

Participant 9: How do you know who your program officer is?

Morgan Jackson: The name, phone number, and email address of the program officer are in the upper left hand corner of the summary statement. I would assert that for all the people on this conference call, I am your program officer.

Participant 9: Yes. Your name is right there.

Morgan Jackson: Yup. My name is Morgan Jackson and my phone number is 301-402-1278. If we haven't had the chance, and even if we have a chance to talk about the summary statement before, I'd be happy to discuss it with you. But please contact me sooner rather than later. Given the competitive environment in which we're functioning -- it's important to put in the time to be able to get as good a product as you can generate and that's better done if we can start sooner rather later.

Participant 10: How many of these projects would be funded or, are there funds available to fund these projects?

Morgan Jackson: Funds are available to fund the projects. The challenge is that this is what's called a program announcement, so the applications have to compete for funding against all other applications. Let me give some general background information.

There is a distinction between what's called an RFA or request for applications and a program announcement or PA. An RFA has moneys set aside that are dedicated to funding applications submitted in response to that solicitation. In that case, there might be a specified amount of money that's allocated. Alternatively, the solicitation to which you submitted your applications is a program announcement, which is a document where an NIH institute or center expresses an interest in receiving applications on a specific subject area. Applications that are received in response to PAs must compete

for funding with all other applications received by the institute or center. Therefore, applications received in response to this PA on the previous round had to compete with all the other applications that came into NCCAM, and once again for the upcoming round, your applications will be competing against all other applications NCCAM receives in that round.

Participant 11: Why was this restricted just to centers that would do minority health and health disparities?

Morgan Jackson: NIH has made a substantial investment in the areas of minority health research and health disparities research as evidenced by the amount of money from the different institutes and centers that has been committed to funding centers of minority health and centers for health disparities research. NCCAM is a very small center. Our budget is a fraction of a percent of the budget of some of the larger institutes and centers at NIH. Frequently, good research requires infrastructure in order to be successful. We identified the opportunity of building on the previous investments by other NIH institutes and centers and as a result of that, linked this PA to those centers as a way of trying to stimulate research on minority health and health disparities regarding complimentary and alternative medicine.

Participant 11: I guess then in terms of revising my application, the decision is -- should I submit under this PA or generally, to a regular November 1 submission date? I mean, why would I submit to this PA as opposed to just generally?

Morgan Jackson: This PA did have the requirement of the application being tied to a minority health or health disparities center. The applications are grouped in the review process even though they go to the same committees. There are slightly different requirements for applications coming in for this PA that make a subtle distinction. We had a similar discussion in the last technical assistant

meeting and because of the special restrictions for this PA. Dr. Goldrosen, NCCAM's Director of Review, suggested strongly that revised applications use the PA's special receipt date which would allow them to be grouped together. For that reason, we suggest using the specific program announcement receipt date of November 14 as opposed to the general receipt date.

Participant 12: I have a question that if you were reviewed and scored, you don't submit as a resubmission? November 1? Isn't that the date for resubmission?

Morgan Jackson: That's the date for general program announcements. This is what you call a PAR program announcement with specialized review and this has a receipt date of November 14, so we are encouraging people to submit on the November 14 receipt date for this PAR as opposed to the November 1 receipt date. It does so happen in this case that the dates are very close together but that's not always the case for PARs.

Participant 12: All right. But they'll still be reviewed as a group in competition with all other submissions, right?

Morgan Jackson: Correct.

Participant 13: I'm still struggling with trying to decide why is it advantageous to do it on the 14th?

Peter Kozel: Submitting your revised application on the special receipt date – November 14th – gives you an additional two weeks in which to work on your resubmission. This “additional” time alone is a good reason to take advantage of the special receipt date, but not the only reason. If you were to submit a revised application on one of the regular receipt dates, it is less likely that the

application will be reviewed by the same individuals as was your initial application. Additionally, we have been advised by Dr. Martin Goldrosen, Director of NCCAM's Office of Scientific Review, that NCCAM intends to "bunch" together applications submitted in response to this program announcement. This may seem like a subtle distinction, but such an arrangement provides a more defined context in which reviewers evaluate applications. Dr. Goldrosen has participated in a considerable number of review meetings and continues to attend the NCCAM study sections. He has indicated that the subtlety of bunching is generally recognized by reviewers and hence it is in your best interest to submit on November 14th. You are free to submit a revised application to one of the regular R21 receipt dates, but NCCAM staff recommend applicants take advantage of the special receipt dates for this program announcement.

Partap Khalsa: I can add on this. I think actually one of the biggest reasons comes back to the theme I'm actually trying to continue to go with here -- the idea of enthusiasm. One of the ways that you generate enthusiasm is because your idea is timely and the fact that NCCAM has released this specific program announcement tells the world, including the scientific reviewers, that NCCAM considers this an area of high program priority. **It is de facto telling the reviewers that, regardless of their personal interest and emphasis, this is an important topic.**

In my own case, in the past when I was submitting applications to NIH, if it was in the response to a specific program announcement, versus an unsolicited application, I would always make it a point to include at multiple places within the text of the application, comments stating that this application was in response to this program announcement and it's the high priority area of NCCAM, etc., just to remind the reviewers in case they were reviewing my application at midnight that this is an important topic area.

I think one of the big benefits that you have by submitting the application directly in response to the program announcement is it helps to say this is something important. NCCAM has actually released a specific program announcement on this topic area.

Participant 12: Thank you.

Morgan Jackson: Thank you. It's three o'clock by my watch. Are there burning questions that need to be answered immediately? If not, I'd like to thank you all for taking time to participate in today's conference call. We'll be reviewing the transcript from the call and posting it to the Website. I would encourage you all to look at the NCCAM Website. There are several places on the NCCAM Website and on the supplemental information page for this PA that provide other technical assistance documents or Websites to assist you in revising and resubmitting the application.

We will have at least one other conference call on the electronic SF424 application package and process and if you are interested, you can send me an email to let me know whether or not you would like to have a conference call on general grantsmanship tips as well. Thank you again.

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